

Guide Sheet 2B: Guidelines for Protection from Adverse Impacts of Modified Runoff Quantity Discharged to Wetlands

Excerpted from 2001 DOE Stormwater Manual for Western Washington

1. Protection of wetland plant and animal communities depends on controlling the wetland's **hydroperiod**, meaning the pattern of fluctuation of water depth and the frequency and duration of exceeding certain levels, including the length and onset of drying in the summer. A hydrologic assessment is useful to measure or estimate elements of the hydroperiod under existing **pre-development** and anticipated **postdevelopment** conditions. This assessment should be performed with the aid of a qualified hydrologist. Post-development estimates of watershed hydrology and wetland hydroperiod must include the cumulative effect of all anticipated watershed and wetland modifications. Provisions in these guidelines pertain to the full anticipated build-out of the wetland's watershed.

This analysis hypothesizes a fluctuating water stage over time before development that could fluctuate more, both higher and lower after development; these greater fluctuations are termed **stage excursions**. The guidelines set limits on the frequency and duration of excursions, as well as on overall water level fluctuation, after development. To determine existing hydroperiod use one of the following methods, listed in order of preference:

- Estimation by a continuous simulation computer model—
The model should be calibrated with at least one year of data taken using a continuously recording level gage under existing conditions and should be run for the historical rainfall period. The resulting data can be used to express the magnitudes of depth fluctuation, as well as the frequencies and durations of surpassing given depths. [Note: Modeling that yields high quality information of the type needed for wetland hydroperiod analysis is a complex subject. Providing guidance on selecting and applying modeling options is beyond the scope of these guidelines but is being developed by King County Surface Water Management Division and other local jurisdictions. An alternative possibility to modeling depths, frequencies, and durations within the wetland is to model durations above given discharge levels entering the wetland over various time periods (e. g., seasonal, monthly, weekly). This option requires further development.]
- Measurement during a series of time intervals (no longer than one month in length) over a period of at least one year of the maximum water stage, using a crest stage gage, and instantaneous water stage, using a staff gage--The resulting data can be used to express water level fluctuation (WLF) during the interval as follows:

Average base stage = (Instantaneous stage at beginning of interval +
Instantaneous stage at end of interval)/2

WLF = Crest stage - Average base stage

Compute mean annual and mean monthly WLF as the arithmetic averages for each year and month for which data are available.

To forecast future hydroperiod use one of the following methods, listed in order of preference:

- Estimation by the continuous simulation computer model calibrated during pre-development analysis and run for the historical rainfall period—
The resulting data can be used to express the magnitudes of depth fluctuation, as well as the frequencies and durations of surpassing given depths. [Note: Post-development modeling results should generally be compared with predevelopment modeling results, rather than directly with field measurements, because different sets of assumptions underlie modeling and monitoring. Making pre- and post-development comparisons on the basis of common assumptions allows cancellation of errors inherent in the assumptions.]
- Estimation according to general relationships developed from the Puget Sound Wetlands and Stormwater Management Program Research Program, as follows (in part adapted from Chin 1996):
 - Mean annual WLF is very likely (100% of cases measured) to be < 20 cm (8 inches or 0.7 ft) if total impervious area (TIA) cover in the watershed is < 6% (roughly corresponding to no more than 15% of the watershed converted to urban land use).
 - Mean annual WLF is very likely (89% of cases measured) to be > 20 cm if TIA in the watershed is > 21% (roughly corresponding to more than 30% of the watershed converted to urban land use).
 - Mean annual WLF is somewhat likely (50% of cases measured) to be > 30 cm (1.0 ft) if TIA in the watershed is > 21% (roughly corresponding to more than 30% of the watershed converted to urban land use).
 - Mean annual WLF is likely (75% of cases measured) to be > 30 cm, and somewhat likely (50% of cases measured) to be 50 cm (20 inches or 1.6 ft) or higher, if TIA in the watershed is > 40% (roughly corresponding to more than 70% of the watershed converted to urban land use).
 - The frequency of stage excursions greater than 15 cm (6 inches or 0.5 ft) above or below pre-development levels is somewhat likely (54% of cases measured) to be more than six per year if the mean annual WLF increases to > 24 cm (9.5 inches or 0.8 ft).

- The average duration of stage excursions greater than 15 cm above or below pre-development levels is likely (69% of cases measured) to be more than 72 hours if the mean annual WLF increases to > 20 cm.

2. The following hydroperiod limits characterize wetlands with relatively high vegetation species richness and apply to all zones within all wetlands over the entire year. If these limits are exceeded, then species richness is likely to decline. If the analysis described above forecasts exceedences, one or more of the management strategies listed in step 5 should be employed to attempt to stay within the limits.

- Mean annual WLF (and mean monthly WLF for every month of the year) does not exceed 20 cm. Vegetation species richness decrease is likely with: (1) a mean annual (and mean monthly) WLF increase of more than 5 cm (2 inches or 0.16 ft) if predevelopment mean annual (and mean monthly) WLF is greater than 15 cm, or (2) a mean annual (and mean monthly) WLF increase to 20 cm or more if pre-development mean annual (and mean monthly) WLF is 15 cm or less.
- The frequency of stage excursions of 15 cm above or below predevelopment stage does not exceed an annual average of six. Note: A short-term lagging or advancement of the continuous record of water levels is acceptable. The 15 cm limit applies to the temporary increase in maximum water surface elevations (hydrograph peaks) after storm events and the maximum decrease in water surface elevations (hydrograph valley bottoms) between events and during the dry season.
- The duration of stage excursions of 15 cm above or below predevelopment stage does not exceed 72 hours per excursion.
- The total dry period (when pools dry down to the soil surface everywhere in the wetland) does not increase or decrease by more than two weeks in any year.
- Alterations to watershed and wetland hydrology that may cause perennial wetlands to become **vernal** are avoided.

3. The following hydroperiod limit characterizes **priority peat wetlands** (bogs and fens as more specifically defined by the Washington Department of Ecology) and applies to all zones over the entire year. If this limit is exceeded, then characteristic bog or fen wetland vegetation is likely to decline. If the analysis described above forecasts exceedence, one or more of the management strategies listed in step 5 should be employed to attempt to stay within the limit.

- The duration of stage excursions above the predevelopment stage does not exceed 24 hours in any year.

- Note: To apply this guideline a continuous simulation computer model needs to be employed. The model should be calibrated with data taken under existing conditions at the wetland being analyzed and then used to forecast post-development duration of excursions.

4. The following hydroperiod limits characterize wetlands inhabited by breeding native amphibians and apply to breeding zones during the period 1 February through 31 May. If these limits are exceeded, then amphibian breeding success is likely to decline. If the analysis described above forecasts exceedences, one or more of the management strategies listed in step 5 should be employed to attempt to stay within the limits.

- The magnitude of stage excursions above or below the pre-development stage does not exceed 8 cm, and the total duration of these excursions does not exceed 24 hours in any 30 day period.
- Note: To apply this guideline a continuous simulation computer model needs to be employed. The model should be calibrated with data taken under existing conditions at the wetland being analyzed and then used to forecast post-development magnitude and duration of excursions.

5. If it is expected that the hydroperiod limits stated above could be exceeded, consider strategies such as:

- Reduction of the level of development;
- Increasing runoff infiltration [Note: Infiltration is prone to failure in many Puget Sound Basin locations with glacial till soils and generally requires **pretreatment** to avoid clogging. In other situations infiltrating urban runoff may contaminate groundwater. Consult the stormwater management manual adopted by the jurisdiction and carefully analyze infiltration according to its prescriptions.];
- Increasing runoff storage capacity; and
- Selective runoff bypass.

6. After development, monitor hydroperiod with a continuously recording level gauge or staff and crest stage gauges. If the applicable limits are exceeded, consider additional applications of the strategies in step 5 that may still be available. It is also recommended that goals be established to maintain key vegetation species, amphibians, or both, and that these species be monitored to determine if the goals are being met.